

State of the State Address  
Delivered by Governor Mel Carnahan  
Wednesday, January 21, 1998

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Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Mr. President Pro Tem, Distinguished State Officials, Members of the 89<sup>th</sup> General Assembly, and Citizens of the State of Missouri:

### INTRODUCTION

When we seek the foundation for a new century, we need not travel far. That foundation is found in the faces of our children.

As governor, I receive all kinds of letters. But the ones I treasure most come from these young people. When they share their questions...their ideas...their dreams, you cannot help but realize how important the work we do here really is.

One of the letters I received came from a fifth grader from St. Louis named John Doyle, who wanted me to visit his school. In that letter, John was thinking ahead. He included a P.S. that read: "I wrote the President a letter and also asked him to come to my school. So make sure you aren't coming on the same day the president is."

Another letter I will always remember came from Jessica Herron of Paris. She just wrote me to say that she thought I looked pretty good for my age. Her civics teacher had told her how old I was, and she thought I looked twenty years younger. So naturally, I wanted you to meet such a perceptive and intelligent young lady. I might add that Jessica ended her letter by telling me to "keep looking good." Jessica, I just want you to know I'm trying.

Rachel Higginbotham from St. Louis sent me a leadership survey, which I filled out and returned to her. And then there are the thank you letters I get for all we are doing for education--like the one I received last summer from Ariel Roads of Moberly. Ariel had just attended our Missouri Scholars Academy where gifted students who will be high school juniors are selected to participate in three weeks of learning and enrichment activities to help them realize the full potential of their abilities.

We also have some other students from last year's Scholars Academy here today--Cecilia Kuntz of Cape Girardeau; Cali Howitt from Springfield; Shayla Day from New Madrid; Grant Ewert of Hannibal; Jean Yu from St. Louis; and Tanisha Robinson from Liberty. Would you all please stand, so we can show you how much we appreciate your being here.

One other Missouri Scholar is with us today, and I want to tell you a little bit about him because he is a young man whose letter made a great impression on me. That young man is Zachary Burden of Kansas City. Zachary attends Oak Park High School where he is on the Student Council, is deeply involved in music, and was President of his Sophomore class and of the Honor Society. As if that isn't enough, he has worked to coordinate activities for children at a local homeless shelter and worked with a home for teenage mothers. Zachary says, "the best way to lead is by example," and certainly Zachary is living by that creed. In his letter, Zachary talks about what makes a true leader, and he describes things such as standing up for what you believe, caring about the people you represent, and knowing when to stand firm and when to compromise.

Zachary Burden wants to be a public officeholder, and I believe he would be a great one. Zachary, would you please stand.

Many of these young people like Zachary Burden may be public servants one day--some of them sitting in the very seats you occupy now. These young people will be running our businesses...caring for the sick and needy...teaching the generation to follow. That's why I wanted you to meet them.

They are the faces of the future...our future...Missouri's future. And the decisions we make over the next few months will have a direct effect on the path their lives will take.

Our legacy should be a solid foundation for these young people to build on--a Missouri that answers their questions...encourages their ideas...fulfills their dreams.

### ECONOMY

Building a solid foundation for the faces of the future begins with a strong economy. Missouri's economy is packing a solid punch with all major economic indicators continuing to flex their muscles.

Since I took office, we have created more than 317,000 new jobs. In fact, over the years of our administration, Missouri's job creation rate has grown a full percentage point faster than the nation's. Our exports have doubled. Last year, Missourians' personal income rose 5.9 percent. And at 3.5 percent, our current unemployment rate has reached an historic low--almost a full

percentage point below the national rate.

Our economy is doing so well because business has confidence in Missouri. We have established a good climate for investment. We are keeping the quality of our work force up.

We have a highly skilled work force that is one of the most productive in the country. And we have a well-defined educational network that gives workers the skills they will need to succeed in the emerging high-tech economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We are keeping the cost of doing business down. For example, by increasing the competition between insurance companies to provide workers compensation coverage, premiums for businesses have declined by approximately \$236 million--with a 10 percent decrease just in the last year alone.

We will continue to work toward improving our business climate and creating jobs for Missourians. And we will continue to keep the financial affairs of state government in order.

We will continue to keep our debt and tax burden low. Currently, only one state in the entire nation has lower combined state and local taxes. And year after year, we balance our state budget.

I want to acknowledge our two budget chairs, Senator Lybyer and Rep. Franklin, as well as the members of their committees, for their role in keeping our state on sound financial footing. Because of our careful budgeting practices, excellent financial management, and pro-active approach to economic development, Missouri continues to be nationally recognized.

### **TAX CUTS**

As a result of our strong economy, we can offer Missourians new tax relief again this session. Last year, we left more money in our citizens' pockets by cutting the state sales tax on food. This year, we want to cut taxes on another necessity--the home.

Our tax cut, called the Homestead Property Tax Credit, would help Missourians who pay real property tax or rent. Homeowners making under \$100,000 per year would be eligible for a partial tax credit on property tax paid. Renters would be given partial tax credit.

Most Missouri households would realize a \$70 savings from this action. For the average married couple, this tax cut would equal almost ten percent of their property tax. The tax cut would begin in tax year 1998 and benefit approximately 2.9 million Missourians. Providing this new tax cut will enhance our national reputation for budgetary responsibility and offer more relief for our working families.

A second action I am proposing offers enhanced property tax relief to those Missourians who need it most--our seniors and Missourians with disabilities. We currently offer a property tax credit for seniors and the disabled known as the Circuit Breaker, which allows many of these citizens to stay in their own homes rather than being forced to go into nursing homes or other care facilities.

Under our proposal, we will increase the number of elderly and disabled Missourians who qualify for this credit, increase the number who receive the maximum credit, and increase the amount of partial credit for those who are eligible. We will raise the income thresholds for married filers so that those earning up to \$27,000 could participate. For single filers, those earning up to \$25,000 will now be eligible.

Taken together, our Homestead Property Tax Credit and the expansion of our Seniors and Disabled Property Tax Credit will provide broad-based and meaningful tax relief, just as we did last year when we eliminated the state sales tax on food.

When our 1997 and 1998 tax cuts are fully implemented, we will have cut Missourians' taxes by over \$460 million a year. This is significant relief that targets the two basics in every Missouri household--food and shelter. In addition, these tax cuts strike a solid balance between our desire to offer Missourians additional tax relief and the need to safeguard the investments we are making to improve their quality of life.

By maintaining that critical balance, we ensure that our strong economy and quality of life will continue. Our efforts to improve the education of our children, move people from welfare into the work force, and keep our citizens safe from dangerous criminals must advance if we are to continue to improve our quality of life.

Compromising our investments of today would sacrifice the future of the faces of tomorrow.

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION**

From the moment these faces of tomorrow come into the world, they are looking to us...for love...for care...for instruction. The latest research confirms that the direction our children's lives will take is substantially shaped by the first five years of their lives.

So it's crucial that we offer our children the resources and experiences they need to grow into bright, responsible adults.

Failure to provide the best care and education for our children in the beginning means we will be paying a high price in the end. Criminal behavior, illiteracy, poor health, and lack of productivity and personal responsibility are much more difficult to reverse later in life and certainly more costly.

We must provide our children with the opportunities they need to be successful. Yet, today, more and more parents must seek help in providing early care and education. More than 60 percent of our parents with children under the age of six work outside the home.

The constantly increasing number of families with two working parents, single working parents, and former welfare recipients moving into work means more Missouri children are receiving more of their care and education outside the home than ever before. Unfortunately, those services are not always easily available, affordable, or of the best quality. And no parents are at their best, personally or professionally, if they must worry constantly about finding someone that they can afford and trust to take good care of their child.

Building on the work of our Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education, I am proposing a three-pronged initiative in this area. First, we must expand the availability of early childhood care and education. Second, we must improve the quality of this education and care. And third, we must enhance health screenings during the critical first three years.

To expand availability, we propose encouraging public schools to create voluntary pre-kindergarten programs we call "Jump Start." The schools who choose to offer these opportunities will have local control and be able to tailor their approach to be responsive to the needs of their individual communities.

Some voluntary pre-kindergarten opportunities such as the Schools of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in Independence are already springing up in our state. We need to encourage this trend by providing start-up grants and other incentives. The result will be more options for more parents and their children.

Expanding access to child care for low-income working families must also be targeted. Since I took office, we have moved more than 82,000 people off of the welfare rolls.

But if our success is to continue, access to affordable child care is imperative. Therefore, our budget will establish 3,900 more child care openings, specifically aimed at helping parents move from welfare to work.

Our second area of concentration targets improving the quality of child care. To help ensure a quality child care work force, we call for scholarships to workers to cover 75 percent of the cost of the continuing training required to work in a licensed child care facility.

In addition, we will bring more training opportunities to in-home providers through our Educare initiative. To encourage the private sector to provide more high quality child care options, we propose redirecting resources to increase reimbursements by 20 percent to our best child care facilities---those that are "accredited".

Our third priority will be early childhood screenings. For the first time, developmental screenings of children under the age of two will be available to every Missouri family that wants them.

Early detection and treatment of delays and problems are critical, so we must make every effort to identify those conditions before it is too late to correct them. We currently have a good network that provides developmental screenings, but it is not complete.

Our initiative will expand access to our nationally recognized Parents As Teachers program and other services that promote healthy development for our youngest citizens. We believe by concentrating on these three areas...availability, quality, and screenings...we can ensure the success of the most important investment in our future--our children.

We all know child care can never take the place of parents. It is only an assurance that in the working parents' absence their child is receiving support, protection, and enrichment. Making available this kind of quality care helps ensure that our faces of the future will enter school ready to learn.

## **HEALTHY CHILDREN**

All of our faces of the future should be healthy faces. Currently, we have 175,000 Missouri children who have no health insurance. Some of them are from families who cannot afford insurance for anyone in the family. Others come from families where employers provide insurance for a parent, but no family coverage, and the cost of an individual policy for that child is more expensive than their family can afford. Many of these children are deprived of good preventive health care services and treatment.

This is unacceptable. By insuring these children, we can prevent many childhood illnesses and disabilities and the expense that accompanies them. Last year, we proposed offering parents access to low-cost private health insurance for their children through our Kids Care Initiative. Even though it enjoyed broad public support and would have made a great positive impact on the health of Missouri's children at no cost to state taxpayers, the legislature failed to pass Kids Care.

Fortunately, the President and Congress both agreed to greatly expand the national commitment to children's health. So last August, our administration filed for a federal waiver to take full advantage of the new federal resources for children's health care.

Today, I am proposing a Children's Health Initiative that builds on our existing Medicaid managed care program to save administrative costs, speed start-up, and ensure consistency of children's health care. The new federal resources will allow us to expand the availability of this managed care coverage for children up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level.

Our proposal also includes strong safeguards to make certain children are not transferred out of existing private insurance plans. These safeguards include co-pays and sliding scale premiums if this side effect, sometimes called "crowd-out," occurs.

Last year, both the Missouri House and the Senate approved language providing children's health care up to 300 percent of the poverty level. By giving your legislative approval of this action again, we can make health care coverage available for 90,000 of Missouri's uninsured children.

Through proper health care and child care, we can ensure our faces of the future get the best start in life.

## **EDUCATION**

Once our children have a healthy start in life, we must ensure that the next stage of their development is strong.

They must receive the education and training they need from our schools to succeed in the work force of a new century. Providing those opportunities for the faces of the future is the most important priority of our administration.

The reforms of our Outstanding Schools Act continue to improve the quality of education in classrooms all across Missouri. Reduced class sizes, more computers, better vocational education, more highly trained teachers, curriculum improvements, higher academic expectations, and more thorough testing of progress are all having an impact on the level of learning in our schools.

Once again this year, we will be fully funding our new, more equitable school foundation formula so all of our students can have the tools they need to achieve. I am also optimistic about the progress that is being made to remove our urban schools from the control of the federal courts.

The joint committee that studied our urban education problems last year did a thorough job. Certainly, there are a number of issues to be worked out, but the committee's recommendations contain ideas worthy of thoughtful consideration.

Our administration is committed to two goals: bringing court-ordered desegregation to an end and even more importantly, ensuring that all Missouri students, both urban and rural, have access to a quality education.

I look forward to working with you during the session as we search for ways to fully achieve those two goals.

Another barrier to some of our children receiving a quality education is unfit teachers. Recent newspaper stories focus on the fact that there are some teachers who are still in the classroom after having been convicted of felonies.

While the vast majority of our teachers are exemplary role models, we cannot tolerate the presence of teachers who may be dangerous to our children's well-being. These unfit teachers--few as they may be--have the potential to do irreparable harm to countless students.

I have already issued an executive order that directs our state agencies to compare the records of certified teachers against the records of serious felony convictions. Now I am asking you to take the necessary legislative action to remove any unfit teachers from the classroom immediately.

Our proposal would automatically revoke the certificates of teachers convicted of a serious felony crime such as murder, rape, sodomy, child molestation, and drug trafficking. We must see that our children are not placed at risk because of criminals in our classrooms.

Another danger to students in the classroom is inappropriate material on the Internet. Thanks to our expanding computer technology, the Internet has become indispensable in opening the libraries of the world to even the most remote schools.

I am proud that you and I have helped schools get access to the Internet. However, unlike our school libraries, the Internet is not strictly designed for students and permits access to inappropriate material for young people.

I want to make the Internet safe for students by helping schools purchase software that blocks access to these inappropriate sites. This software can prevent certain words from being used in computer searches, blocks access to particular sites, or allows access to only approved sites.

While some schools have begun to purchase this software, their purchases have been limited due to financial constraints. Our initiative would make grants available so that within two years, this software to make the Internet safe for our children could be purchased for any school that wants it.

We must continue to expand access to technology for our students. But we must do so in a way that protects our children. I believe this effort will allow us to keep that critical balance.

In addition to access to technology, it is imperative that our young people realize how important post secondary education is to their ability to compete in the world today. A high school diploma is no longer sufficient for much of today's job market.

A thirteenth and fourteenth year of education has a dramatic effect on our citizens' earning power. Yet the rising cost of receiving any education above high school is a major barrier for many Missourians. So we must be committed to helping more of our citizens obtain the skills they desire.

President Clinton's Hope Scholarship has been approved on the federal level to offer up to a \$1,500 federal tax credit on tuition and fees for students who want that thirteenth and fourteenth year. But even with the Hope Scholarship, we have gaps. The Hope Scholarship does not cover some of our low-income students.

Therefore, I am proposing a Bridge Scholarship this year that will bridge the gaps between the Hope Scholarship and other sources of financial aid. Under the Bridge Scholarship plan, students who cannot take full advantage of the Hope Scholarship and other financial aid could still receive up to \$1,500 a year with a lifetime maximum of \$3,000.

Bridge Scholarships will provide us with a seamless federal-state approach that will give our citizens access to the opportunity of a 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> year of education.

## **CRIME**

Just as important as shaping our faces of the future for success is our responsibility to protect them from harm.

Our administration has already made great strides in reducing crime rates through our tougher sentences for dangerous criminals and violent juvenile offenders, our lifetime sentences for sexual predators, and our increase in better trained and equipped law enforcement officers.

But right now, another threat is stalking our citizens throughout the state--the monster known as methamphetamine. It lurks in homes, barns, sheds, cars, and hotel rooms, leaving a trail of contamination, death, and destruction in its wake.

Once trapped in "meth's" addiction, the victims face severe health damage or in many cases, death. The reason for its popularity in the drug market is that it's easy and cheap to produce and buy.

Our state has become a "Meth Mecca" because our geographic location provides convenient access to any part of the United States and our rural nature makes it easy to hide an illegal lab in isolated areas. These labs can explode, endangering the lives of innocent people nearby. Law enforcement officers are often seriously injured just from the fumes when they attempt to break up one of these labs. And each pound of "meth" produced in one of these labs creates five to six pounds of hazardous waste to pollute our air, water, land, and livestock.

With all of the dangers "meth" carries with it, it is imperative that we make a coordinated effort to rid our state of "death by meth."

As a result of recommendations from our "Meth" Summit last fall, I am proposing a three-pronged attack to crack down on "crank"--an attack that:

---toughens laws against manufacturing and trafficking;

---gives more resources to law enforcement;

---and expands treatment options for those addicted.

I am urging that we impose penalties that place "meth" manufacturing and trafficking in the same criminal categories as other highly addictive drugs. I'm calling for reductions in the amount of "meth" that is necessary as evidence to gain a felony conviction. I'm ordering new investigative, crime lab, and officer safety equipment as well as new "meth" training for officers. And I'm proposing new prevention and early intervention services to catch at-risk young people early.

We must stop this "epidemic of evil" from spreading across our state and infecting our citizens.

As I mentioned earlier, as a result of legislation the General Assembly passed in 1996, our courts and prosecutors now have the tools to sentence individual "sexual predators" to a life sentence. However, because of pending constitutional issues at that time, our new law did not apply to those who are already in our correctional and mental health systems.

But now that the courts have settled the issue, I believe we must take further steps to make certain that the citizens of our state are not victimized by these threats to our society.

I urge the General Assembly to enact legislation which allows the departments of Corrections and Mental Health to identify and detain in custody those individuals who are likely to attack again but are not subject to our current sexual predator law. This is another significant step in giving Missouri citizens the safety they deserve.

In providing that safety, I believe there is another action we must take this legislative session. We must fund the replacement of our Jefferson City Correctional Center for the safety and security of both the community and the correctional staff. This prison has served the citizens well since 1836 but has become increasingly more costly to operate and maintain over the years. By replacing this facility now, we will enhance public safety while saving Missouri taxpayers \$49 million.

I want to acknowledge Senator Lybyer for his work on this issue. He has been a longtime supporter of this replacement because of its benefits to public safety and its cost-effectiveness.

By continuing to provide strong weapons to fight crime in Missouri, I believe we can keep our commitment to protect the hope that is found in our faces of the future.

## CONCLUSION

As you know, I visit with many schoolchildren. And in those faces, I can see that hope burning. In those young people's eyes, I see the intelligence, the enthusiasm, and the energy that will build a better Missouri for all of us. Our actions in the months ahead will give our children that chance.

Recently, when I had a public event with a group of third graders, at the end of our time together, one little boy was giving interviews to the media. When one of my staff remarked that the next Walter Cronkite was standing there, the little boy's teacher told her: "You don't know how much today means to him. All his life he has been shuffled from one foster home to another. But today, he's somebody."

I believe all our citizens should have the opportunity to be somebody. I know I will never forget the action of someone years ago that inspired me to want to be somebody.

When I first ran for state representative, he gave me a buckeye. Now in the Ozarks, where I come from, a buckeye is supposed to bring good luck. But to me, receiving that buckeye was more than that. To me, that simple gift said: "Someone believes in you."

I carried that buckeye for years in my pocket, and every time I touched it, no matter what was happening in my life, good or bad, that message came back to me: "Someone believes in you." The man who gave me that buckeye was my father.

Even to this day, I keep one in my desk drawer. And opening that drawer is like opening up all that love, that strength, and that inspiration that he gave to me.

So before we came here today, I gave each of these young people a buckeye. I gave it to them in the hope that it will always be a reminder, no matter where life may take them, that we believe in them.

And that's why we're here today. Because we believe in our young people. We believe in our state. We believe in our future.

May God grant us the strength and the wisdom in the days ahead to act on that faith--a faith in the faces of the future.

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